Interview with
JOHN BRUNNER

THRUST
SCIENCE FICTION

Winners of the
SCIENCE FICTION
WRITING CONTEST

Volume 2, Number 2, January 1974

THRUST
SCIENCE FICTION

Thrust Science Fiction, Volume 2, Number 2, January 1974, is published bi-monthly by the University of Maryland Science Fiction Society. Cost is 25¢ per issue. For special bulk wholesale rates and advertising information, contact Doug Fratz, 202 Cumberland Hall, College Park, Md. 20742, 454-3585. All contributions are welcome and all originals will be returned. Print run: 1000. All contents © 1974 Doug Fratz.

WINNERS OF THE THRUST SCIENCE FICTION WRITING CONTEST

First Prize: Joseph Lerner
Second Prize: Mark Cooper
Third Prize: John W. Bieber
Honorable Mention: John J. Symborski, Jr.
Chris Lampton &
Dave Bischoff

STAFF

Editor-in-Chief: D. Douglas Fratz
Managing Editor: Steve Goldstein
Associate Editor: Chris Lampton
Assistant Editor: Dave Bischoff
Layout Assistants: Felipe Alfonso, Judy Lewis
Typist: Kathy Waugh
Writers: Joseph Lerner, Mark Cooper, John W. Beiber
Artists: Glen Moy, Vaughan Bode, Dan Steffan, Roy Comiskey, Rich Adams, Steve Hull
Photographic Assistant: Rick Eskite
Publicity Editor: Dallas Hart

CONTENTS

Cover by Glen Moy.....1
Staff page.....2
Lost Runes of Luas by Joseph Lerner.....3
Letters.....6
S.F. Conventions.....6
The Promised Land by Mark Cooper.....7
Into Hades by John W. Belber.....11
Interview with John Brunner.....12
The Most Dangerous Man in the World by Chris Lampton and Dave Bischoff.....16

EDITORIAL

Welcome to what I think is by far the best issue yet of Thrust Science Fiction. This issue contains the winners of the Thrust Science Fiction Writing Contest, one of the winners of last year's Science Fiction Art Contest, and some of our regular excellent features as well.

Particularly outstanding is this issue's cover painting by Glenn Moy. It was chosen co-winner of first prize in last year's contest by Ted White, editor of Amazing and Fantastic. And we are happy to announce that Glenn has now gone professional, as a result. Watch the covers of future issues of Amazing and Fantastic for more of Glenn's supurb artwork.

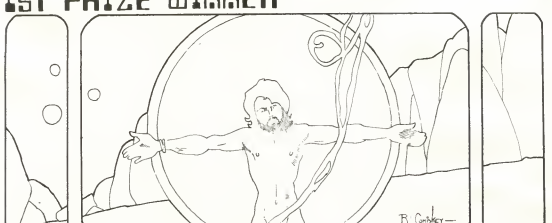
Science fiction, at its best, can be very moving, and Joseph Lerner proves it with his story this issue, which was chosen winner our our Thrust Science Fiction Writing Contest. Joe is also trying to attend the label of pro, and I feel confident he soon will. I think this is the best sf I've published in Thrust yet. The story is supurbly illustrated by local artist Roy Comiskey.

Filling out the fiction are the excellent winners of second and third prizes, by Mark Cooper and John W. Beiber, and an intriqueing tale by Chris Lampton and Dave Bischoff. Finishing off the issue is an interview with John Brunner that Steve went all the way to England to get!

See you all again next issue.

– Doug

1ST PRIZE WINNER



by Joseph Lerner

THE LOST RUNES OF LUAS

Michael Flaherty sat uneasily opposite the desk from Director Halstadt and watched him thumb through a heavy looking folder. The small office had large bay windows and Flaherty could see construction workers busy assembling prefab domes for the settlers soon arriving from Earth. The domes were rising along the fertile banks of a wide, shallow river. In the distance stretched a dry, scrubby plain and beyond lay a range of bleak hills.

"So what seems to be the problem, Dr. Flaherty?"

"You've read my report?"

"Yes."

"Then you know I haven't been getting any co-operation whatsoever around here. Why was I brought to Helias if I wasn't to be given the freedom I need to pursue my research?"

"Dr. Flaherty, must I remind you that it is Terran government policy to assimilate alien cultures as quickly as possible to solidify Terran domination of the planet? You have to understand that certain freedoms must be restricted, until our objectives are achieved." He paused. "Now why did you wait so long before telling anyone that you finally discovered the key to understanding the ancient Luassian language?"

"There was other related work I wanted done first. Besides, after you asked, I gave you my report, didn't I?"

Halstadt sidestepped the question and asked instead, "Do you know Dan Waters?"

"Of course. He used to be one of my assistants."

"But you dismissed him. Why?"

"Clash of personalties, that's all."

"Wasn't it really because he objected to the surreptitious manner in which you were carrying out your research?" Halstadt paused. "Waters came to me with some very interesting information. He said that you have reasons to believe that the ancient Luassian science, although technologically primitive, was highly sophisticated in the field of psychic phenomena. But the scientists, for fear of their discoveries being abused, confined the essence of their knowledge to only a few texts, especially one called The Book of Lost Runes."

"That's ridiculous. There's no proof that such a book existed."

"Then why do you want permission to visit more villages? Isn't it to collect more books, perhaps even to find the Book of Lost Runes?"

"Not at all. I simply want to study Luassian culture more closely."

"But don't you have enough data already?"

"We could always use more data."

"I suppose you could. Parts of your report are pretty damn ambiguous. But then, maybe I haven't seen the whole report."

"I've given you all of it, Director."

"Then why are your translations missing?"

"I haven't begun to translate anything yet."

"That's not what Waters told me."

"Then Waters is a liar."

"Oh, is he? I'm not so sure of that. In fact, I think it is you who are the liar."

"But, Director--"

"I'm sorry, Dr. Flaherty, but you have left me with no alternative. I'm putting you under house arrest until you decide to be more cooperative." He pressed down an on intercom button. "Sergeant? Have three soldiers come in to escort Dr. Flaherty back to his quarters."

Helias' three crescent moons formed a triangle in the night sky. Flaherty watched them from his window. The sun would be up in another hour or so. Flaherty could also see two of the three guards posted around his house.

Although they had frisked him and had searched his home, they had been very apologetic about it. After all, wasn't Flaherty a respected and honored man? Surely in a couple of days he will realize his error and hand over the missing translations to the Director. But Flaherty had no love for the Terran government and he had vowed to do everything possible to prevent The Book of Lost Runes from falling into their hands.

Flaherty glanced at the desk beside the window, knowing that a laser gun, overlooked by the soldiers, was in it. With that gun he could easily escape. But if Flaherty had been unable to shoot Waters when he had known his former assistant had been about to betray him, it would be even more difficult to use the gun now. But it was either now or never.

He pocketed the weapon and opened the front door. The soldier nervously thrust his gun at Flaherty. Flaherty saw one other soldier out of the corner of his eye. The remaining guard was around on the other side of the house.

"Take it easy," Flaherty said. "I can't sleep and I want somebody to talk to. Do you mind?"

They talked. After a while, in an unthinking moment, the soldier put down his gun. Flaherty shoved his pistol into the soldier's ribs.

"Keep talking as if nothing has happened. And don't think I won't use this. Now let's go."

"Where?"

"Forward that soldier, over there." When they came within a few feet of the other guard, Flaherty said, "Throw down your gun, unless you and your friend want to get killed." The soldier nodded and tossed his revolver to the ground. "Now face the wall. Both of you!" Flaherty began backing away. "And don't move."

At a hundred feet distant, Flaherty turned and began running. The perimeter fence was just a few yards away. The guards spun around and started shooting, but by then he had already burned a hole in the fence, jumped through it and was sprinting across the field.

Flaherty was familiar with the terrain and underbrush provided ample cover for him. By dawn, he reached the nearby hills and hid in their cavern riddled slopes. At night, he took off again and walked across a barren valley to the next range of hills. By dawn of the second day, tired and hungry, he reached the Luassian village of Nardu.

Unlike the aliens of other worlds, the Luassians shared more or less the same genetic traits as humans. Flaherty thought it ironic that Earthmen, instead of treating the Luassians more deferentially, only subjected them to even greater oppression.

The women, already sitting outside their small huts, were busy weaving, making pottery, or nursing children. Further downriver Flaherty saw the man of Nardu drag their fishing nets in from the waters. The few fish they had caught wriggled weakly in the sand. The Luassiars all looked so emaciated that Flaherty wondered how the women had enough breast milk to feed their babies.

Then Flaherty turned his eyes to across the river. The ancient city could be peered through the dust-filled air, its fountains and towers and archways, although in ruins, still gleamed majestically beneath Helia's green sun and clear, orange sky.

"Michael!"

Flaherty spun around and saw a Luassian running towards him. At a few feet away, the Luassian stopped to catch his breath. He was young, tall and had green skin and hair. His thin face displayed prominent cheekbones and chin and his orange eyes glimmered intently from deep set sockets.

"Hello, Silon," Flaherty said.

"We heard about your escape. In fact a military aircar loaded down with police was just here a few hours ago looking for you."

"Do you think they'll return?"

"Probably, but don't worry about that now. Come. You must be famished."

They began walking towards Silon's hut.

Silon said, "It will be dangerous for you to stay here."

"I know that. I plan on leaving."

"And go where?"

"Into the jungles."

"My friend, that is even more dangerous than being recaptured by the Terran police."

"Do I have any other choice?"

"Yes. Don't go alone. Let me come along. I know the jungles and the Luassians would be less likely to harm you if I were with you."

"But why risk your life like that. Is it because of the Book?"

"Yes." He paused. "You know that it is forbidden for my people to even gaze upon the runes of ancient texts, much less try to understand them. But like you, I wish to learn the meaning of the ancient teachings. That is why I have tried my best to help you in your work. Besides, by assisting you, I have incurred the enmity of the people of my village. It is now as dangerous for me to stay here as it is for you."

Flaherty smiled. He had been hoping that Silon would want to come with him. "How long will it take to get ready?"

"We can have my longboat outfitted and supplied in just a few hours."

They left in the afternoon. The vegetation soon grew dense and tropical. The river led into a lagoon bordered by vast stretches of marshes and swamps. Giant trees separated by great distances over the surrounding vegetation. Occasionally, the pillars and gilded roofs of sunken temples showed above the foliage.

At sundown three days later, they encamped in the ruins of an ancient courtyard and tower. They spread out their maps and books on the ground and began to study them. Only one small continent, Luas, and a scattering of islands rose above the waters of Helia. Silon and Flaherty were heading into the very heart of the continent, to where the ancient cities of Luas had first risen.

Night fell. Flying reptiles circled slowly over the lagoon, their flourescent wings glimmering beneath the purple sky and three half moons. Silon had already gone to sleep but Flaherty stayed awake. Using a small lantern, he continued poring over the maps and texts in hopes of finding more clues leading to the location of The Book of Lost Runes.

Flaherty thought he had a pretty good idea where the Book was. The ancient Luassian capital, Tusavor, had dozens of small libraries hidden in a pyramid riddled with labyrinthine passageways. The Book was someplace in there.

The Book of Lost Runes. The name sounded so magical, so cryptic. In it, he knew, were written the chemical formulae by which one could conjure up the most awesome power imaginable. Yet he also knew that the ancient Luassian civilization of Luas had crumbled shortly after the Book was written and it was nonsense to think that the two events were unrelated. But despite the opinions of the many ancient commentators whom he had read, Flaherty felt that the demise of the civilization was caused by misuse of the Book rather than because it was inherently evil. At any rate, even if it did mean his own death, Flaherty was determined to find the book.

And what about Silon? Flaherty knew that Silon was anxious to learn about the Book, but Flaherty was very reluctant to tell him anything of real significance. Silon reminded Flaherty of Waters. Waters, too, had been more than just an assistant to him: they had been close friends. And after he had betrayed Flaherty, Flaherty had felt he could no longer afford to trust anyone, including Silon. The stakes were too high to take such unnecessary risks.

After several hours, he turned out his lamp and went to sleep.

They left shortly before dawn. In the clear waters they saw neon fish scuttling past the steps and fountains of submerged courtyards.

Silon said, "We should be in Gambeded in a short while. I have a cousin there who can help us get new supplies."

By nightfall, they arrived at Gambeded. They docked beside a pier partially hidden by jungle. Platforms and rope bridges intersected with each other over underwater gardens lit by overhanging fluorescent lamps. They walked over to a small, stone building chiseled with intricate carvings. An old woman with green and silver hair and rose colored eyes came out to greet them. She showed her cousin and his friend inside. After Silon had explained what they needed she said she would procure the necessary supplies for them. She acted cordially, but Silon and Flaherty could both feel the tension in the room. It was obvious that the old woman felt very uncomfortable with Flaherty there. They stayed the night. The next morning, they began loading new supplies into their longboat. The villagers watched them with hate-filled eyes.

After they had left Gambeded, Flaherty said, "Is that the kind of treatment we can expect from now on?"

"There are no more inhabited villages between here and Tusavor."

"And in Tusavor?"

5

"Yes. We will have to be very careful when we get there."

The humidity was becoming so bad now that the air seemed coated with a hot, viscous film. Water clung to the foliage and glistened beneath the orange sky. Huge snakes lay coiled on the sun-heated rocks and rattled their tails in time to the music of wild birds. In the waters, colored pebbles and rocks shone like clusters of gems.

After hours of silent rowing, Silon spoke up. "We should be in Basmador soon. No one lives there anymore, but there is a large library with many ancient books that should provide us with more clues to tell us exactly where the Book is."

They left the lagoon and entered a river hemmed in by precipitous cliffs. Rainbows arched over the innumerable falls. After a few hours the river led into a lake ringed by still more cliffs, the jungle spilling over their edges, vines swinging down like tangled, matted ropes. In the middle of the lake were several ruins peering through the weeds and bushes.

"That is Basmador," Silon said.

They reached the longboat and got out. Silon led Flaherty to one of the structures still fairly intact. The inside of the building was lined with rows of hermetically sealed cases that looked like they had just recently been broken into. Shards of glass lat strewn among the weeds and mud.

"The books are gone," Silon muttered.

"Well, that's all right." said Flaherty. "I think we have enough information already to find the Book."

"But look over there."

A few yards away were the fresh tire tracks of a military aircar.

They decided to keep close to the river but to travel by foot to avoid observation from the air. Occasionally, the rubble of ancient towns lay scattered along the banks or stuck up out of the waters. Although many of these towns had libraries, Flaherty would have to wait until Tusavor before finding books that would be preserved. That is, unless the Earthman got to them first. But Flaherty was certain that they could not possibly know where the secret libraries were and without The Book of Lost Runes all the other books were worthless.

The river began turning into rapids as the land became more rooky and inclined. After reaching the summit of a steep hill, they saw in the distance barren and craggy mountains thrusting up out of the jungles. Tusavor was in a valley just beyond that range of mountains and began climbing them. Flaherty and Silon saw gradually unfolding the geography of the continent. The river Gafna curled through the jungle as the vegetation swept in a wide arc out to the horizon. Flaherty thought he even saw the white rim of the desert as well as the ocean beyond.

They got to the top of the mountain and looked down at a large lake bordered by massive cliffs and crisscrossed with marshes and islands. Towers and pyramids of rusted bronze rose above the waters. Hundreds of straw huts, some on stilts, others on floating piers, dotted the lake. Longboats with triangular sails floated beneath ancient stone archways.

"So that's Tusavor," said Flaherty.

"My friend, before we go any further, there is something that I want to know."

"What?"

"I thought I was to be more than just a guide to you. I thought I was going to learn about the Book, perhaps even study the ancient language. So you think I'm too stupid to learn?"

"Of course not. But these things take time. Maybe after we find the Book--"

"Michael, there has been time enough to discuss these things, but whenever I ask you a question you either brush it aside or answer very superficially. Why? Don't you want me to learn?"

"Silon, I--"

"You don't have to hem and haw. I know the answer. You don't trust Luassians, do you? You are no different than any other Earthman. You think we are too ignorant and superstitious to be given such knowledge. But it was my people who wrote the Book in the first place." Tears were flowing down his cheeks. "Well, that's all I have to say."

Flaherty laid his hand on Silon's shoulder. "I'm sorry, Silon. I promise you that once we find the book, I will show you how to use it."

They got into Tusavor under cover of dark. Silon and Flaherty swam silently, keeping close to the rushes and beneath the piers. The three full moons lit up the sky and cast a pale glow over the lake. Shadows loomed everywhere, stretching out ominously across the iridescent waters. Flaherty recognized among the people still awake many wearing Terran uniforms. Flaherty and Silon swam towards a pyramid that dwarfed the nearby piers, towers and huts. Its steps, covered with barnacles and seaweed, disappeared underneath the waters. They dragged themselves onto the steps and laid there panting, their waterproof bags floating beside them.

Flaherty said, "If this is the right pyramid, there should be a portal someplace around here."

Silon grabbed Flaherty's arm. "Look--isn't that it?"

They saw what looked like a hatch protruding at an angle above the steps. Flaherty and Silon scurried over to it and began scraping away the barnacles and seaweed. It had a handle and an inscription. Flaherty looked at Silon and nodded.

"This is it," he said.

They pried open the hatch and lowered themselves down into it. Silon flicked on his lamp. They were in a tunnel that descended in steps to a long, wide, level passageway with doors on both sides of it. The walls were covered with inscriptions and paintings. Flaherty took out a book from one of his bags.

He said, "The eighth door on the left should lead to the room where the catalogue files are kept. By going through them in alphabetical order we should find the card telling us what room the book is in. Just like in any other library."

They tried opening the door but it was either stuck or locked. Silon burned it open with Flaherty's laser gun. They then found themselves in a large, circular room several stories high with a dome ceiling. Spiral stairwells led to various galleries. In the center of the room were several rows of cabinets. Flaherty ran over to them. He pulled out a particular drawer and began flipping through the cards. They showed no signs of decay. He then put the drawer back where it belonged.

"All right," Flaherty cried. "Now I know where it is. Come on, let's go."

They followed the tunnel as it twisted and turned and Silon watched silently as Flaherty would refer to his notes, stop at one door, burn it open, go down another corridor, up a stairwell, down more corridors.

"We're not lost, are we?" said Silon.

"I'm not sure, but I don't think so." His brow was covered with sweat. They came to another door. "This should be the room."

Silon burned the door open and they stepped inside a small, spherical chamber. Except for the book, all the shelves were empty. Flaherty ran over to the book and opened it to the first page.

"This is it!" he cried. "My God, Silon, we've found it--"

Silon pointed his laser gun at Flaherty. "Good. Now you can hand it over to me."

"What? Silon--"

"I don't want any arguments from you."

"But what could you do with the Book? You can't understand it."

"No. Not yet. But I will learn. I have been watching you carefully, more carefully than you think, and I have learned a lot. It may take me months or years to translate it on my own, but that will be better than letting you have the Book." He wiped the sweat from his face. "Now bring it over here."

Flaherty walked slowly toward Silon. He lay the Book on the floor in front of him. Silon dropped to his knees to pick it up. Flaherty quickly pulled out another gun and shot the Lussian through the chest. Silon fell over, dead.

Flaherty leaned over Silon's body and then covered his face with his hands. Tears ran down his cheeks. He had loved Silon, loved him perhaps more than anyone else he had ever known. He hadn't meant to kill him. How much was the Book worth to Flaherty? Was it worth the murder of his closest friend?

Flaherty picked up the Book, and trembling, opened it. He skipped the introduction and began reading the text. It was simply the listing, with instructions, of the formulae of various chemicals that if swallowed will greatly alter and enhance the powers of the mind.

He then turned back to the introduction. As he read, he felt what it had been like at the height of Luassian civilization. He saw the domes and towers and pyramids as they had been thousands of years ago. He looked into the minds of Luas' greatest scientists, men who had perfected the arts of telepathy, astral projection and telekinesis. But then he watched as the Luassians, out of jealousy and fear, began to hunt down and murder their leading scientists. Then their culture began to slide irrevocably into a long, dark age.

Flaherty closed the Book. He now realized that it was wrong to horde such knowledge for himself. He would not make the same mistake as the ancient Luassian scientists had made. He would try to help the Luassians use their own knowledge. If they would trust him.

He left the room and began heading back outside. The sun would be up very shortly and it would be harder to escape into the jungles.

SF CONVENTIONS

MINICON (Jan. 27) University of Maryland Student Union, Admission free, Dealers of comics and science fiction.

International Star Trek Convention (Feb. 15-18) Hotel Americana, New York. $7 in advance, $10 at door, $4 per day. Guests: Isaac Asimov, Hal Clement, Dorothy Fontana, DeForest Kelly, Nichelle Nichols, George Takei. Write: ISTC, Box 3127, Church St. Station, N.Y., N.Y. 10008.

Baltican (Feb. 15-18) Lord Baltimore Hotel, Baltimore. Frederik Pohl, GoH. $3 in advance, $4 at door. Write: Ted Pauls, 821 E. 33rd St. Balto., Md. 21218.

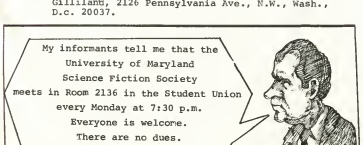
V-Con (Feb. 20-22) Hotel Georgia, Vancouver. Frank Herbert, GoH.

Boskone (March 1-3) Sheraton-Boston, Boston. Isaac Asimov, GoH. $3 before 2/15, $5 at door. Write: NESFA, Box G, M.I.T. Station, Cambridge, Mass. 02139.

Marcon (March 29-31) Holiday Inn, East, Columbus, Ohio. Hal Clement, GoH. Write: Larry and Cele Smith, 194 E. Tulane Rd., Columbus, Ohio 43202.

Lunacon (April 12-14) Staten-Hilton, N.Y.C., Forrest J. Ackerman, GoH.

Disclave (May 24-27) Sheraton Park Hotel, Wash., D.C. Frank Kelly Freas, GoH. Write: Alexis Gilliland, 2126 Pennsylvania Ave., N.W., Wash., D.C. 20037.


My informants tell me that the
University of Maryland
Science Fiction Society
meets in Room 2136 in the Student Union
every Monday at 7:30 p.m.
Everyone is welcome.
There are no dues.
Movies will be shown
the last Monday of each month.

LETTERS

Dear Editor:

Thanks for the copy of Thrust. I must call your attention to a couple of errors in transcription in the interview:

> In discussing Worlds of the Imperium (pg. 4, para. 5), Bayard is the hero, not the villain - the villain is Bale. At another place I said "ridickledockle," not "ridiculocockle."

Otherwise it was an interesting issue.

It was a pleasure seeing you and the rest of the troops and I'll see you again.

Sincerely,
Keith Laumer
Brooksville, Fla.

Dear Editor:

I was delighted to discover Thrust. I am a teacher of life science and extremely interested in encouraging the use of science fiction in the schools. I believe that reading science fiction promotes flexible, creative thinking and helps prevent "future shock" by preparing students to approach old questions imaginatively, as well as to accept new questions. I want to urge the use of science fiction in science, literature and social studies courses. Some S.F. might be suitable for math and other courses. As we all know, old ideas die hard and S.F. is only now becoming accepted as "respectable" - and that not in all circles. You at the University of Maryland are part of a new generation; perhaps if you can touch our next generation of teachers by reaching those who are now being trained to teach yet the next generation....

Paula C. Mayhew
Kent Jr. High School
Hyattsville, Md.

Send all letters of comment to Doug Fratz, 202 Cumberland, College Park, Md. 20742.

2ND PRIZE WINNER

by Mark Cooper

THE PROMISED LAND

Bill wheeled the starship into earth orbit the way he used to wheel his antique jalopy around the dirt track in Sioux City. This was the kind of flying that he liked, manual, tactile. He could feel the power of the stelquad engines surging in the controls, and it was a feeling that he liked. Adventure was one of the reasons he had joined the space program, the adventure of sitting atop a throbbing fireball pointed at the stars. But this deep space probe had turned out to be anything but adventurous. Sleeping for centuries as the star ship sped across billions of light years of unexplored space did absolutely nothing for his sense of adventure. He was almost thankful for the meteor that had somehow managed to elude the ship's defense mechanism and strike the computer storage area. The probe had aborted and they were awakened.

All of their navigational computers had been knocked out and Eric, the co-pilot, had had to chart a course back to earth manually. It had been an exhausting trip home. Every few light years they had to awaken, adjust their course and then go back into suspended sleep. Exhausting or not, it had been more exciting than just sleeping as the entire universe passed by.

"This is earth?" Bill asked Eric, setting the ship into a high orbit.

Eric was busy taking readings and did not answer until he was finished. "Unless there is a macro-range identical to earth's macro-range, that we never knew about, which is very unlikely, this is earth."

Bill frowned. Eric was an astronomer, a scientist, and not in any respect an adventurer. As far as Bill was concerned, he was too serious. To be sure, scientists were necessary, but necessary or not, they tended to be boring.

"How unlikely is very unlikely?"

"Well, our probe was not designed to go beyond the macro-ranges charted by unmanned flights. With a few minor discrepancies, which are to be expected, the charts have been correct. I would say that this is the earth."

There was a deep sense of relief in Eric's voice that Bill resented a little. Eric wanted space exploration to be no more dangerous than riding an astro-train to the office, which is exactly what Bill had avoided by getting into the deep space program.

"Well, if this is the earth," Bill said, "then I imagine that Tiger Base II is in quite an uproar."

Because the crew of each deep space probe would be in suspended sleep for such a long time, at each of the space launch bases there were a number of technicians who were also in suspended sleep. As soon as the space probe entered the earth's macro-range the technicians were awakened electronically.

"You know," Eric said, "that has been bothering me. If they picked up our signal, they should have contacted us by now."

"Well," Bill said, "even though the signalling device appears to be working, it might not be, or procedures might have changed as some of the other probes came in."

Eric nodded. "Let's go home, then."

Bill eased the ship toward Tiger Base II. There was clearly something wrong. No matter how drastically procedures had changed, they should not be allowed to get this close without being challenged. As they broke through the atmosphere, Bill cursed. Tiger base was a huge complex dotted with launch pads and control madules. Beneath them was a plain that appeared as barren as any stretch of universe that Bill had ever seen.

"Some navigation," he said, half seriously. He was perfectly willing to grant Eric a mistake.

Eric was far more concerned. "I swear, this is the place."

Bill powered down for a rough surface landing. He surveyed the landscape, but there was little to distinguish one place from the next. After they touched down, he got out his exploration suit while Eric checked his readings.

As Bill poked around what should have been Tiger Base II, he got the strange feeling that he was in the right place. The base had been located in the desert southwest. Before the base had been built, he felt, this was exactly what it would have looked like. Before returning to the ship, he collected a few samples of the soil and plant life. There were several varieties of desert plants that hadn't been visible from the ship.

"Geographically," Eric said, "this is the place. The air is a little bit cleaner and a few other things are a little bit off, but that is understandable. If they have moved the base, the ecology would certainly have changed."

"You think they moved the base?" Bill asked, getting out of his suit.

"That seems to me to be a good explanation."

"Perhaps," Bill said, moving towards the controls. "Perhaps." He had decided to fly straight across the country toward Washington. He would certainly attract some attention by doing that.

The natural landmarks were perfect, rivers, valleys, mountains, all in place, but none of the man-made objects were to be seen. Thick forests covered the eastern part of the country. The rivers were sweet and clean. Chemical tests showed the water was pure, no human wastes, no industrial wastes.

Eric was distraught. "Simple explanations just don't fit," he said. "Even a holocaust, mass destruction, would leave some traces. We must be so lost that we have found a world whose characteristics and location are, relative to everything else within range of our sensors, identical to earth's."

"Or," Bill said, "we passed through a warp in space and are now in a parallel universe. Or this is the earth and this is America sometime prior to the 1600's."

Eric frowned. "You always did favor the exotic. I think we ought to get as far away from here as possible. Once we get a good ways off, the sensors may be able to pick up another set

of familiar macro-ranges, and I'll be able to navigate us home."

"You check the stars and I'll check out the planet." Bill headed out across the Atlantic. If this were earth and they had gone back in time, which was what he thought most likely, he wanted to know at what time that had landed. He headed toward London, but it too was uninhabited. He continued east - Rome, Greece - but all were the same: pleasant, uncluttered. He set down on the Nile. The sun was coming up and Bill was tired. Eric had been insisting for over an hour that the search was futile. He wanted to go back to the point of the meteor impact and head in some other direction.

Bill stretched out on his couch, a bit annoyed with Eric. "Let's think about this for a while," he said. The flora and fauna are clearly earth. The soil and location are clearly earth." He laughed. "We have all the time in the world. Let's poke around here a few more days before we go tearing across the universe. This is an opportunity that we shouldn't miss."

Three hours later, as they worked slowly across the Middle East, they encountered the first signs of life. There was smoke rising from what appeared to be a village beside a stream. Bill's understanding of ancient history was fuzzy, but the village seemed too advanced to be the very beginning of civilization. He surveyed the area for a safe spot to land and told Eric to take maximum security procedures.

Bill moved slowly out the ship with his hand laser drawn. The air was hot and dry. They had set down behind a hill about a mile form the village. With Eric about ten yards to his left, they began a fire support movement toward the village. First Bill advanced about twenty yards, then Eric about forty yards, then Bill about forty yards, and so on, until they reached the top of the hill.

Moving toward them were two old men, waving their arms vigorously and shouting. Bill and Eric were amazed that the two men were speaking English. Bill halted them about 30 yards from the top of the hill.

"Who are you?" he demanded.

"We are Tryolites. And who are you?"

"We are earthmen," Bill answered, immediately. No earthman had ever encountered an alien humanoid life form, but each deep space probe team had been rigorously trained in how to act in the event that they did. The psychologists reasoned that there would be a natural suspicion and fear of the aliens. That fear could easily be overcome right foul attempts at peaceful intercourse. Bill was feeling more excitement than fear, but he was thankful for his training. He had a tremendous urge just to run down the hill and shake hands with the Tryolites.

"Earthmen! Earthmen!" the Tryolites repeated, excitedly. They were visibly agitated by Bill's response.

"What planet is this?" Eric asked.

The tryolites chattered between themselves for a few moments.

"Earth," they finally replied.

After an hour of tentative questions and assurances of friendliness. Bill accompanied Gorkon, the Tryolite, into the village, while Eric escorted Demson, the Tryolite, back to the ship.

"You are sure you are earthmen?" Gorkon asked.

Bill nodded. "And are you sure this is earth?"

Gorkon nodded.

Bill shook his head. "I just don't understand it." Several possible explanations had occurred to him, but each had a major flaw.

They were seated now, facing one another, and Gorkon looked deeply into Bill's eyes.

"If this is the earth," Gorkon said, "of which I am almost certain, and you are an earthman, which I believe, and you honestly do not know what has happened, then I think I understand, but I doubt that you will believe me."

Bill grinned. "Try me."

Gorkon hesitated. "You will have to bear with me. Your very existence poses great questions for me, I am, myself, attempting to integrate certain rather shattering insights into my reality."

"Take your time," Bill said, smiling. "I am certain you're in a lot better shape than I am."

"It appears that there are certain master species in the universe. To be sure, all species evolve from other species, so, in theory any species may ultimately become a master species, but at any given moment there are only a few master species. We Tryolites have known for a long time that we are one. We had wondered if there were others. I guess that you earthmen are a master species as well."

"Homo sapiens would be technically correct, I believe," Bill said, but Gorkon paid no attention.

"Evolution is a random matter. It progresses on two levels, an uncontrolled level and a controlled level. As the uncontrolled level approaches its culmination, it aborts. That is, once the outcome is clear, it moves, in a controlled manner, to the beginning of the next stage, without ever reaching the conclusion of the previous stage. The exception, perhaps, is the ultimate culmination in unity, although I am not certain about this.

"We Tryolites are ascending across time and space, approaching that unity. At least, this is what we believe. Many millenia ago, we received this understanding of the course of evolution. Since then, we have been inhabiting progressively more beautiful and pleasing worlds. This is the beginning of our stay in this wonderful place."

"Wait. Wait. You evolve on a planet toward some decisive moment. I follow that, but then what? How is this leap across time and space accomplished?"

Gorkon shrugged. "We only have a belief in this matter. The unity we approach is with a force that judges and controls the stages of evolution. This is where you, earthman, here, at the same time as we, unaware of the process of evolution, are such an anomaly.

"For millenia we have wondered about the direction of our progress. We had every indication that we were ascending. Once we received the insight into the process of evolution, we wondered whether descent or devolution was possible. Once knowledge was attained, we sensed that ascent was assured. Of course, such an attitude might lead to complacency and then.... We just never knew.

"If understanding is the key to ascent, then it seems reasonable that the first thing a species in descent would lose is its understanding. You, earthman, ex-inhabitant of this glorious world, must be, without knowledge, a member of a species in descent. Remarkably, two master species cross in this place, one ascending, the other descending."

Bill contemplated this fantastic story. Numerous discrepancies popped into his mind. He felt himself clearly superior in technology and scientific knowledge, but there was no need to attack the Tryolite with this assertion. Besides, the Tryolite seemed to know what was going on and he had no idea.

"Suppose," Bill began, "there is a great force, a unity toward which certain species evolve." He would work with the Tryolite's story for a while. "Suppose this force, omniscient, omnipotent, judges the progress of species and assigns worlds to them on the basis of merit. How did we two humans happen upon this place? Why did this force let us find our old planet? Surely it didn't forget we were out there. Why are you telling us this? Will we perish the moment you have finished or will we wander aim-

lessly around the universe, never able to find our race again, never able to impart this knowledge to them?"

Gorkon rose slowly. "I am beginning to comprehend this now. The concept of descent is new, but fascinating. Ancient myths of my people, from the time before understanding, come rolling back to me. Think, think of a species in descent. Think of a species inhagiting uglier and uglier worlds. They have no understanding of what is happening. They feel no regret, suffer no remorse, unless...unless they are made aware of what they have lost. Once they are aware, what then? There is a vast difference between knowledge and understanding."

Bill rose. He wanted to discuss this with Eric. Parallel development of cultures on earth had intimated the possibility of parallel development of cultures in space. Gorkon was talking about the sequential repetition of a constant pattern by one species on a series of planets or different species on the same planet.

"I think it is time for us to separate," he said. "There are standard procedures for establishing relations, but they hardly seem appropriate at the moment."

At the top of the hill, the four men stood in silence. Eric had heard the same story.

"What was your planet like?" he asked.

"Hot and dusty, wind storms all the time, little water and few animals."

"More importantly," Eric added, "where is it?"

Gorkon pointed into the sky.

Eric sighed. They clearly couldn't give him any information he could use.

"What did you do on that world?" Bill asked. "When we reached that planet, we took to the caves and set about surviving. It was a nasty world and we expended much energy in simply surviving. We discussed what we should do on that world whenever we had a chance. After several thousand years, our species reached a decision." Gorkon stopped and looked away.

Bill waited for Gorkon to continue, but finally could wait no more. "And what was that decision?"

"Alas," Gorkon said, "I do not remember. None of us does."

Inside the ship, Bill and Eric discussed their next move. Their orders were, in the event of damage to their ship, to head immediately home and make no further contact with other beings. They had carried that out to the letter. If they stayed and investigated the Tryolites, they had no guarantee that they would ever find their home base in order to make a report. In addition, they both had the feeling that Tryolites had nothing further to say. Blocking out the fantastic story they had been told, the only logical thing to do was to return to the point of impact and start looking for the earth. Presumably, once they found the earth, they could always find this planet again.

The story, however, made the logic seem absurd. If it was true, they could never find earth. They might find the human race, but they had absolutely no idea where.

"Listen, Eric," Bill said, preparing for lift off, "mark this place well. I have an annoying feeling that this is the earth."

"Who are they, then?"

"Survivors of some completely devastating holocaust, who have decided to try and isolate themselves from all returning earthmen, by convinding them that this isn't the earth."

"If that's the case, where the hell are we going?"

Bill smiled. "That's one of my exotic solutions, that even I have trouble believing. Besides, I would just as soon see what this place looks like in a couple of hundred years."

"Well," Eric said, "that's how long it will take us to get to the point of impact, look around, and come back if we have to."

When Bill and Eric awoke from their suspenden sleep, they were surprised to hear an animated voice on the radio. They were also surprised to remember everything that the Tryolites had said. They had returned to the point of impact with the meteor and then projected an identical flight pattern in the opposite direction. After a while, they had picked up a set of macro-ranges similar to earth's, though they were less familiar than those in which the Tryolite planet had been.

"Identify yourself. Identify yourself at once," the voice on the radio said.

Bill shook his head. Coming out of a suspended sleep was worse than a bad hangover, he decided.

"Identify yourself," Bill said, homing in on the signal and heading straight for it. He wanted as close a look as possible, before he gave anything away.

"What?" the voice on the radio answered.

"Identify yourself," Bill repeated. He set the ship into a high orbit.

"This is Tiger Base II. Now identify yourself."

"This is deep space probe Beth II," Bill said reflexively. He wanted to get as close as he could before revealing his identity. As he moved in toward the base, however, there was a heavy cloud cover that kept them from making visual contact, though their instruments told them there was a huge industrial city below.

"Wait one, while I check your voice print," the radio operator said. "Welcome home, the voice said after a few minutes. "Come in on approach path two."

As they dropped down on their final orbit, they could not believe their eyes. None of the land masses were in the right shape. The surface of the planet was brown and dry, with great spouts of dust swirling toward the sky. At irregular intervals were domed cities, each about thirty miles in diameter.

Bill looked over toward Eric and smiled. "Home!" he exclaimed.

Eric was not smiling.

"Integrate," Bill said. "Integrate. We must integrate understanding into our reality."

Eric nodded. "You know, Bill, this does not necessarily have to be the Tryolite planet."

Bill thought for a moment and waved for Eric to continue.

"Well, we have been gone a long time. Interstellarly, this planet is earth, just as much as the place where we met the Tryolites. Well," he paused, "that can't be true either. There are two similar sets of macro-ranges in the universe. Now, as for the difference in ecology, hell, the human race could have totally destroyed the earth's ecology and been reduced to living in domed cities in one tenth the time we have been gone."

Bill nodded. It was a good, solid, logical explanation. "Do you mind if I opt for the exotic" he asked.

They were greeted by the director of the station through the membrane of the decontamination chamber.

"Well, Bill and Eric," he said cheerfully, "how was your trip?"

They smiled. "Fine, sir."

"And how was your stay with the Tryolites?"

They were both startled.

The commander turned to examine the life system readings of the occupiers, which were displayed on a console near the decontamination chamber. He nodded to one of the technicians, who pressed a button that silently filled the chamber with cleon gas. In a few seconds Bill and Eric died a painless death.

"Assistant Jones," the commander said. A petite young woman moved to his side.

"Sir?"

"Issue the usual space sickness bulletin to the populace and add that this is the last deep space probe. Point out that the crew of each of the probes contracted the same mental illness, which is a clear indication that the original suspended sleep mechanism, which has since been replaced, was faulty. There is, therefore, no longer any reason to fear the illness." He paused. "You might also reiterate that the two fools who escaped beyond the environmental sphere suffer from the same illness."

II

3RD PRIZE WINNER

by John W. Beiber

INTO HADES

Looking through the window, I was as stunned by the sight of Hades as I had been the first time I ever saw it. You just could not get used to a star like that. Hades was a binary star consisting of a black hole, Hades A, and a white hole, Hades B. Both were of course invisible. But hot gasses continually emerged from Hades B and arched majestically into Hades A. As these gasses traveled, they radiated. Midway between Hades A and B they were violet. But as the eye followed them in either direction, towards either star, they became successively green, then yellow, then red, then faded off invisibly into the infrared as their light suffered more and more gravitational red shift. It formed an incredible three-dimensional rainbow rotating against the blackness of space. It was the most beautiful thing I ever saw.

It was believed that black holes were a gateway into another universe, that our black holes were their white holes and vice versa. That was why we– an interplanetary assortment of adventurers and malcontents–were going into Hades A.

By now we were over the proper spot. We fired our rockets and started in. The intensifying gravitational field caused time to dilate, caused our lives to redshift. By the end of the first day, hundreds of years had elapsed outside. All men that we had ever known were dead. By the end of the second day, a million years had passed. Midway through the third day we approached the Schwarzschild sphere. I looked behind us. Billions of years had passed out there since we had left, but the stars still shined. It was not too late to turn back. Then we crossed the sphere. In those few seconds, an eternity slipped by outside. The stars dimmed and went out. The universe had died, and was cold. We were the only ones left in it. But we could no longer return to it. To try to stop and turn around would be like trying to stop time.

By the end of the third day we entered the star itself. Hades A was neither dense nor hot, just big. Glowing gasses swirled redly around us. On the seventh day we passed through the center. Seen from the outside we became a mathematical point. But we could tell no difference. Even after we had passed through there was no perceptible change. Red gasses still swirled. We might have been in the same star. But we weren't. For now we were traveling outward. We were somewhere else, in a white hole, in another star, and, we believed, in another universe.

In another week we crossed the Schwarzschild sphere of the white hole and got our first look at where we had come. We had speculated during our journey about what we would find when we arrived at whatever we were going. When man had first left Earth and traveled among the stars, he had expected to find new and strange lifeforms. He had found them, but to his surprise, they were more alike than different from lifeforms on Earth. But we were not merely going to another star. We were going to another universe. What would it be like? Would the laws of physics be the same? Would there be planets and stars? Would they be inhabited? (God, I hoped they would be. I never felt more lonesome then when we crossed the sphere into Hades A and saw our universe die behind us.)

Now we had crossed the sphere and got our first look outside. There was nothing but blackness. We scanned the entire spectrum with our instruments. We searched for gamma rays, x-rays, visible light, radio waves. All we could find was the spectrum characteristic of blackbody radiation of about 4 kelvins, nothing else. Nothing else, that is, except for the bombardment of light and matter we were emerging from the white hole from which we had just emerged.

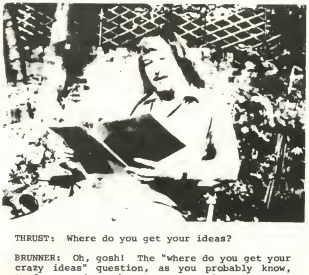
I was the first to utter the thought which I am sure was on all our minds. This was exactly what we would expect our own universe to look like in the infinite future, after entrophy had pushed the universe to its inevitable heat death. In such a universe we would have expected the ever present 4 kelvin blackbody background, and the cold carcasses of long dead planets and stars. Only the white holes, with their different time scales, would continue to pump energy and life into the universe. But such objects were rare, and were only a minor perturbation on the cold all around. That cold seemed to reach into the spaceship and grab all of us. But we shook it off quickly. We were in no immediate danger. The ship's nuclear plant would probably operate long enough to allow all of us to live out our natural lives–if one could call such lives as we faced "natural." And we were not yet certain that this was our own universe. Perhaps we were in a new universe after all, and there was actually more to it than met our glance.

But this hope was quickly dashed. For coming into view as we orbited the white hole was a sight which none of us could for a moment mistake. It was the beautiful arched rainbow of Hades. All was now clear. We had gone into Hades A, passed through some strange spacetime bridge, and emerged from Hades B into our own universe, now dead.

What could we do? For some years we wandered about exploring the lifeless planets, seeing what kind of civilization had existed before all had perished. This was at first amusing, even fascinating. But eventually we came to realize that the loneliness and deathly cold all around was slowly driving us insane. There came a time when, for no particular reason, we steered the spaceship into position and allowed it to fall again into Hades A. The voyage was identical to the first such, except this time there was no universe to watch die behind us, and no soaring expectation of finding a new universe on the other side. Before we had expected life, and had found death. This time we expected death.

But we found life. Coming out of Hades B, we were met by a spacecraft of strange design. The spacecraft appeared in no way hostile, so we allowed it to take us in tow and guide us to a planet. There, after overcoming a language problem, we were questioned. We told them our story. We discussed with their scientists what could have happened, and a reasonable theory emerged. By returning into the black hole, we had again spanned an eternity in a matter of weeks. And, whereas the first time we jumped into the infinite future, into a universe infinitely expanded and dead, the second time going through Hades had thrown us into the doubly infinite future, when the universe had contracted from infinity and been reborn in a new Big Bang. And we had emerged from Hades B into a universe similar to the one we had left so long ago.

We found, as men from Earth had once found of men from the stars, that our interrogators were more alike us than different. In fact one of our questioners, a female named Polyphony, was from a race hardly distinguishable from our own. Polyphony and I fell in love, and soon we married– though we could not produce children. Eventually we moved to her planet. It was very much like Earth. An ancient religion from Earth had held that all things move in cycles. We alone of all beings had lived through a full turn of the greatest cycle of all. And we had found peace and happiness. We would not go into Hades again.



INTERVIEW WITH JOHN BRUNNER

THRUST: Where do you get your ideas?

BRUNNER: Oh, gosh! The "where do you get your crazy ideas" question, as you probably know, tends to make writers turn purple and starts smoke coming our of their ears. Everybody has ideas and a lot of people have ideas that are even crazier than the ones that come tc science fiction writers. There is no such thing for a writer as a problem of ideas; there is only a problem of expression. The difficulty is not in finding ideas, but in finding what to do with an idea once you've got it. Ideas are two-a-penny. I once counted the section of my card file where I put down ideas for unwritten stories and there were 92 cards in it. That was about five years ago; I don't think I've used many of them since.

THRUST: Once you have an idea, how do you go about putting it on paper?

BRUNNER: That depends entirely on how complex the idea turns out to be. After years of practice, a writer's subconscious tends to deliver ideas for attention only when they have some shape to them. Some ideas come up as novels, scenes in a novel, short stories; some come up as poems, for goodness sake, or as a theme for an article. Once the idea appears in a form that looks as if it is going to be usable, it is entirely a function of its probable complexity as to what preliminary stages I have to go through before tackling it. In the case of a really elaborate and ambitious novel like The Sheep Look Up or Stand On Zanzibar, the essential work is done not so much at the typewriter or the desk as during a period which, as in the case of Stand On Zanzibar, may be two years long - during which it mulls in the subconscious. Eventually, when I sit down to write, I should have the whole plan in my subconscious ready to come out. So that the time actually spent at the desk is not nearly as important - and is often considerably shorter - than the time spent in pondering the idea and fleshing it out from the original bare bones.

THRUST: Do you really believe that the future will be as bleak as you make it appear in The Sheep Look Up?

BRUNNER: The problem with being a science fiction writer these days is that you have to make do with what material is offered you by the real world. This has always been true, of course, but at the present moment the real world is offering far more material for dystopic than for utopic writing. There is a fundamental assumption in The Sheep Look Up: that the human race is so apathetic about its own shortcomings that it may prove in the long run not to be a viable species. Personally I detest this idea. I hate the notion that I might belong to a non-viable species. But the more one looks at the consequences that have resulted from our present technological ingenuity and the degree to which we have rushed ahead blindly in traditional "bull in the china shop" fashion, regardless of what we trample down on the way, the more one is inclined to believe that perhaps things will be that bad. I sincerely hope that I'm wrong. I hope that the mere fact of my publishing such a book - along with the many, many other writers who are striking the same note - may possibly cause people to mend their ways. But one dare not look for that. One dare not hope for it.

THRUST: When you began writing your huge, experimental novels, like Stand On Zanzibar, The Sheep Look Up and The Jagged Orbit, did you know that they would turn out the way they did?

BRUNNER: To be quite candid, no. There was a point during the writing of Stand On Zanzibar when I realized I had written the contracted number of words - which was 120,000 - and I had said just about half of what I wanted to say. So, in a considerable tizzy, I got on the phone to my London agent and he told me not to worry, that he had been talking to Anthony Blond, the London publisher, a few days earlier, and he had said that his novels sold on the basis of weight regardless of merit. So, fortified by this reassurance, I went back and finished the book. It came out on Doubleday's word count to almost twice the wordage I had contracted for. Once one comes to grips with a theme as complex and as close to home as that, the number of ways in which one can foresee a given single line of argument altering what we take for granted is the conventional pattern of contemporary human life is effectively infinite. One could go on exploring the ramifications of the single assumption I made in Stand On Zanzibar indefinitely. That is, that overcrowding and overpopulation would become so intense, that in the more thoroughly governed nations of the world they would impose genetic legislation. That's really the base line from which I started. When one thinks of all the necessary preliminaries to a decision like that - the ways in which our society would have to change in order to make the passage of such legislation not only possible but popular - then one is into an almost limitless range of exploratory, theoretical, hypothetical ideas.

THRUST: Do you follow a set, daily pattern in your work?

BRUNNER: Effectively, my only system is this: that when I'm working on something, all other things stop. In so much as I have a typical day, it will start with my reading the newspapers and the mail. I will then deal with any urgent correspondence and walk down the road to the post office to send off my replies. I get down to work about mid-morning, eleven or eleven-thirty, and work for as long as is necessary to produce what I regard as a good day's work, let's say five thousand words plus. It depends very much,

Interviewed by Steven L. Goldstein.
Transcribed by Steven Goldstein, David Bischoff and Chris Lampton.

though, on what stage my current project has arrived at. On a final draft, for example, I don't need to discipline myself nearly as severely as when I'm doing an initial draft. If it's a new item that I'm working on - something that hasn't been through the typewriter at least once before - then I am obliged to break off at a point where I can safely sleep on the material and come back in the morning knowing exactly what I was going to say. This occasionally drives me to work until two, three, four o'clock in the morning. But less often now than a few years ago.

THRUST: Do you have any advice to give to aspiring writers?

BRUNNER: Yes. There is one lesson above all others that must be learned and that's persistence. If there is a universal fault among novice writers, it's an inability to determine what the page says to the reader as opposed to what you want it to say to the reader. I'm sure that Chip Delany will forgive me for quoting an example. Chip is beyond reach of such reproach now; he has become a very thoroughly polished technician. But several years ago, when I was staying with him in New York, I - being incurably curious - took a look at the page he had in his typewriter and said, "Chip!" He came over, looked at it, and said, "I see what you mean." He had written, "She took her hand from the rail and caught her breath." Well that's a terribly easy flaw and, while I hate to say it, it's all too typical of the aspiring writer. He can't tell what the page is going to say to the reader; he thinks only in terms of what he wants to say. Once a would-be author sees how the page - rather than himself - will talk to the reader, then he's pretty well got it made. But this involves doing an enormous amount of editorial work and re-writing. So it calls for persistence: you have to be prepared to go back and look with the coldest, deadest eye possible at what you've written, instead of saying, "Gosh! Wow! Gee!" and rushing around to all your friends to say how great it is.

THRUST: Do you have any comments on the influence mainstream writers have had on science fiction?

BRUNNER: Well, I hope that one doesn't really need to comment on this, because the trade has been two-way all the time and long may it be so. I hate the notion of being shut off in a separate category. I have, of course, written many things outside of science fiction and where I have been conscious of being influenced by a writer in another field I have never made any bones about the fact that I'm borrowing his technique. There is Newton's celebrated statement about himself: "If I have seen a little further than others, it is because I have stood on the shoulders of giants." Any writer working in the 20th century is standing on the shoulders of giants; giants who can be traced back for perhaps five or six thousand years.

THRUST: What are you working on currently?

BRUNNER: At the moment I'm in a state of flux. I'm not quite sure what I'm going to do next. I'm off to Canada at the end of this month; in fact less than a week from now. When I get back I hope to take my wife on holiday to Italy - long overdue and very well deserved. During the last part of this year I hope to write a novel for Harper - the contract is supposedly in the works - which will be called The Shock Wave Rider. It will be a fictional dramatization of some of the ideas developed by Toffler in Future Shock.

THRUST: Do you plan to write any more fantasies in the future?

BRUNNER: Well, if you happen to know a TV producer in search of a property, I'd like to write an adult fantasy TV series. But as things stand, no. It would be in fact likely if I got any such media commissions - I'm angling for one at the moment - that they would be for an SF thriller series, rather than a fantasy. My plans as to adult fantasy novels are, at present, non-existent.

THRUST: Do you have any comments on the work that Michael Moorcock has done lately with the rock group, Hawkwind?

BRUNNER: Yes. Hawkwind's noisy!

THRUST: Is that all?

BRUNNER: Oh, Hawkwind's not a bad group. They've been doing some very enterprising stuff, particularly with blending electronic sounds to produce tones that they cannot get any other way. And they've tackled some quite ambitious extended numbers. But to be absolutely honest, for hard rock to start speaking to me it has to be somebody like the late Jimi Hendrix on the delivery end, or Eric Clapton. It's not my favorite branch of contemporary music and I've really only managed to appreciate those artists who have an extraordinary and exceptional talent; a talent that would shine forth no matter what branch of music they had chosen to express themselves in. My personal preference among contemporary pop groups are the folk rockers - what they call "electric folk." I've been particularly following Steeleye Span across the years. I got into music of all kinds through Dixieland Jazz, which I was a great fan of in my teens. While everyone else in the Dixieland group I played bad clarinet with in school was going the other way and learning from Lester Young and Miles Davis, I was going backwards to Bessie Smith and Leadbelly and to the folksong in general. As a result I have a tremendous bias toward the traditional folk dances and tunes and I'm delighted that so much is being done by people like Steeleye Span. Oh, yes - and by a very shortlived group called Mr. Fox which I enjoyed immensely, but which was a husband and wife team and broke up along with their marriage. I've also enjoyed this recent revival of medieval dance music. I've been following it with great fascination since it broke onto the scene.

THRUST: Does that have any relation to the Society for Creative Anachronism in the U.S.?

BRUNNER: Oh, I know a lot of members of the S.C.A.

THRUST: Has that spread to England yet?

BRUNNER: No, but there are a lot of equivalent organizations over here. For example, there's a group called The Society of the Sealed Knot, which re-enacts the battles of the English Civil War. They go back into their period in very much the same way that the S.C.A. goes back into Medieval times.

THRUST: At the University of Maryland there's a group called the Maryland Medieval Mercenary Militia. Once a year they re-enact the Battle of Hastings - among others.

BRUNNER: Well, I sincerely hope you'll pass on to them some information that I've learned quite recently. King Harold was not killed by an arrow through his eye. I've just purchased a definitive study of the Bayeux Tapestry and it points out that actually the arrow shown as killing Harold was bent towards his eye during a 19th century reconstruction - performed because it had become moth-eaten or something. Harold is actually the next character, being chopped down by a Frenchman with an axe.

THRUST: That should make next year's re-enactment somewhat more accurate.

BRUNNER: Tell them to look at the tapestry again. The arrow is bent in the middle.

THRUST: When you started writing were there any particular writers that you imitated?

BRUNNER: Deliberate imitation, no. Because at the outset I was determined to go my own way. Looking back, however, I can see now that of all the authors I admired at that time - which,

Heaven help me, was more than twenty years ago - Charles Harness must have been most influential with stories like "Flight Into Yesterday." I honestly cannot recall another writer who was publishing around that time who impressed me more. Charles Harness, at that time, could do all the grand, extravagant things like Ed Hamilton or A.E. van Vogt and yet retain a basic self-contained logic within his stories. He would erect - for the purposes of a giant extravaganza - a totally logical set of explanations, and this I admired enormously. I think also that I must have been influenced to some extent by the flip, light, wisecracking style that Eric Frank Russell used in a great many of his books. Subsequently, I think I've managed to evolve a relatively personal mode of expression. When I do adopt something from another writer now, it's specifically a technique and not a style.

THRUST: Are there any particular writers that you admire currently or any trends in SF writing that you think will continue into the future?

BRUNNER: A great many of the former. I am delighted to see how many of the writers who came into the SF field in the past decade or so are not confining themselves to the printed word. Chip Delany, for example, with his radio plays for WBAI. That kind of thing. He's even produced a film which he's told me about, but I have not seen. I look forward to seeing it.

THRUST: Would that be The Orchid?

BRUNNER: I believe that's the title.

THRUST: It was shown at the Noreascon in 1971.

BRUNNER: Yes. I gather that the audience gave it a rather cool reception. I was not in that audience, so I will merely go on record as saying that I am glad that people like Chip Delany are getting into that sort of thing. It's something that I've done myself, but only to a very limited extent. I have not had the free time I would need to go in that direction. As for upcoming young writers, I've been enormously impressed by the work of James Tiptree, Jr. I think that he has hit me harder than any writer to arrive on the scene since Delany.

THRUST: How did you feel when you won the Hugo Award for Stand On Zanzibar? Had you expected to win?

BRUNNER: To be quite honest, my first feelings were of annoyance at Randy Garrett, who took the trouble of ringing me up at 7:00 a.m. London Time. It wasn't until an hour or two afterwards - well past breakfast - that I had a chance to consider my situation. Yes, I was most certainly hoping that it might get the novel award that year. It was undoubtedly the most ambitious novel I had written up to then. I was gratified that the fans thought it to be a notable achievement, but my primary joy was related to the fact that if a writer wins such an award, he can command the publisher for a larger advance on his next book. So one tends to take an awfully pragmatic view of awards of this sort.

THRUST: I understand that you've had some trouble with American editors who enjoy altering your work. Didn't you have some trouble over The Productions of Time?

BRUNNER: Yes. That novel, which can be found in its original text in the British Penguin Edition, was the subject of continual disputation between myself and New American Library. I won't go into the awful details, but I will say that the American edition wound up with 55 unauthorized changes in the first chapter alone, which annoyed me extremely. The problem was that the copy editor they sent it to had a tin ear. He just did not hear the words. I got extremely knocked up over that; I blew my top, in fact. A lot of the trouble that authors run into with editors can be straightened out if the editors are reasonable people and if the authors dig in their heels on the preliminary assumption that the editor is going to deal him the dirt. Ever since I learned that lesson, I've had no trouble. Let me supplement that. No writer worth his salt will ever resent constructive editing. But constructive editors - as contrasted with meddlesome editors - are very hard to find. In fact, it was once repeatedly said that the editor of one quite reputable science fiction magazine kept a trained marmoset in his apartment to fiddle with the endings of stories.

THRUST: Since I've been in London I've noticed that much fewer of your works seem to be available here than in the United States. Is that because of the smaller market in England?

BRUNNER: That's part of the reason. It is a source of continual disappointment to me that about three-fifths of my work has never been published in Britain. Since I began supporting myself as a free-lance writer, the American Market has been my mainstay as far as income is concerned. In some years, as much as 85% of my income has come to me from the U.S.

THRUST: I've noticed, lately, that you've been doing considerable re-writing of your earlier works. Is this because you've greatened your ideas concerning those books or is it for financial reasons?

BRUNNER: To some extent the reason is financial, but one actually gets very little extra money for doing a re-write - unless, of course, there is a second sale, which is very hard to come by. Few publishing houses, except for the low paying ones, are even interested in re-issuing an author's books, unless that author has suddenly won the Nobel Prize or something. No, there's a much more practical and personal element involved here. When I was a young free-lance writer struggling to support myself in my early twenties, I was often forced by financial necessity to send off a manuscript that I knew would have benefitted from being put on the shelf for a couple of months and then being re-written from end to end. As things stood, I literally could not afford the luxury. So I had to publish an awful lot of half good books. In a few cases the plots struck me as good enough to be worth updating, so as the rights for the original edition reverted to me five years from their original publication I've punctiliously reclaimed them. Now and then I've re-written books that I felt I should have done a better job on the first time around - because the plots were essentially good, solid ones and the fault lay in the writing, not in the story.

THRUST: I notice here that you used a pseudonym on some of your earlier works.

BRUNNER: Yes. Keith Woodcott was wished on me by the late Ted Carnell on an occasion when I'd had two or three stories in the same issue of one of his magazines - Science Fantasy, I believe. It got to the point where John Brunner was beginning to compete with John Brunner in the Ace line of books, so I published some of my books under that name in the U.S. However, I've tried to avoid publishing under pseudonyms as much as possible.

THRUST: Of all your novels, was Stand On Zanzibar your favorite?

BRUNNER: It's pretty close to my favorite. But it's difficult to be dogmatic about it. What happens - and I don't think I'm alone in this - is that at certain points in a writer's career he finds himself able to write a work of substance; a book of more demanding quality than he has previously been able to produce. In my own case there have been a number of high points. Plateaus, I suppose you would call them. The first of these would be Squares of the City, in which I set out to write the most ambitious sort of book that I could handle at that time. A similar case arose with Stand On Zanzibar; that was the most ambitious book that I could conceive of writing. But in between there had been Telepathist, which was published in the States as

15

The Whole Man, which I equally think represents the best I could do at that time. I sincerely hope that I haven't written my best book yet.

THRUST: That reminds me of the career of Robert Silverberg, who also went from Ace Doubles to novels of greater depth.

BRUNNER: I admire Bob Silverberg's talent tremendously: very few writers have the degree of talent that can support them for years of hack writing. I mean hack writing in the best sense; that is, writing on commission. He wasn't by any means doing Grub Street hack writing. But he was supporting himself by collecting commissions to do literally anything and then turning in a workmanlike job. This is, in a sense, more eroding to a writer's talents then doing something he despises. One can easily fall into the habit of being satisfied with second best. In Bob's case, he somehow preserved the ability to edit his own writing and doesn't it show!

THRUST: Tell me, was The Traveller in Black influenced by any other fantasies that you'd read?

BRUNNER: Oh, goodness yes! I wrote the first Traveller in Black story because I had just thoroughly enjoyed reading James Branch Cabell's The Silver Stallion. I particularly enjoyed the section of it in which Miramon Lluagor unfortunately discovers the way to turn loose three of the bees in the Pleiades. So I thought it would be rather fun to see if I could tackle a piece in "high style" - a rare exception to the fact that I borrow techniques and not styles from other writers, as I said earlier. I quite deliberately set out to create a personal adaptation of Cabell's "high style," the kind of thing that you find in The Silver Stallion. I had so much fun doing the first one, which was published in Science Fantasy, that I thought I'd do a second one. Science Fantasy had changed its name to Impulse by then and Impulse died. But I'd already plotted a third one, which Ted White bought for Fantastic. They got scattered all over the place like buckshot pellets. Eventually Terry Carr said that if there were enough Traveller in Black stories to make a book he'd be happy to put them in the Ace Specials series. So I wrote a fourth one, which Ted White also published. Then I went back and re-wrote all four of them to eliminate some of the repetitious material and to smooth out any irregularities stemming from the fact that they had been written, in some cases, more than a year and a half apart. That is the limit of the outside influence, however. The Traveller is my own conception, inspired, perhaps, by the wry attitude of Cabell's Koschei, his creator who built the universe to while away a boring afternoon.

THRUST: Have you ever considered doing a collaboration?

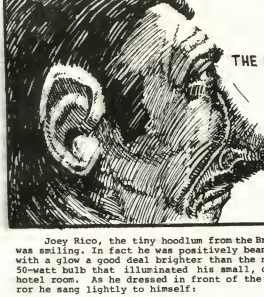
BRUNNER: Yes. And, indeed, I once wrote a short story in collaboration with Kenneth Bulmer. But, to be absolutely candid, I found it thoroughly uncongenial and, on balance, I feel that there are very few writers that I've met with whom I could happily in collaboration. I'm too - I think the American phrase would be "ornery" - we would say "bloody minded."

THRUST: You mentioned before that you've dabbled with other methods of communication. What are some of these?

BRUNNER: I've written some poetry. I've been integrating verse of various standards into my science fiction novels more and more. Stand On Zanzibar was a pioneering effort in multi-media presentation within the context of the novel. Now that's a horrible set of cliches all wrapped up into one breath! But I've been finding ways in which I can apply some of the disciplines that I've learned in trying to establish myself as a poet and there's a book coming out from Bantam called Next to No Time, in which the most influential character is a poet. I had the gall to fake some of his poems and use them as what I call 'interfaces" between the chapters of the novel. This sort of thing is opening a whole new range of verbal skills for me and I've been thoroughly enjoying myself. When I was told that I was having a poem published in the London Journal, New Statesman, I think I did something then that I had not done since I heard that Stand On Zanzibar was being bought by the publisher who had commissioned it: I literally got up from my chair and jumped for joy. This particular aspect of my writing is by no means financially worthwhile, but there's a tremendous amount of personal satisfaction in it. Just last weekend I was very struck by a review in The Observer by Simon Raven of a new selection of pieces from The Greek Anthology, the celebrated compilation of epigrams and snippets and witty little quatrains which enshrines much of the most quotable verse from the Greek tradition. One thing that bothered me particularly was the contrasting of two versions of the epitaph on the Spartan's grave at Thermopylae. He quoted J.W. McHale's translation, which is celebrated in many school books: "To tell the Spartans, thou who passest by/That here obedient to their laws we lie." And he quoted a modern version by the editor of the collection - "I believe his name is Jay - that goes: "Inform the Lacedaemonians, friend, we rest here understanding their orders to the last." He very correctly castigated the first as pompous and the second as limp. Honestly! I got so knocked about it that I wasted the best part of a working afternoon seeing if I could do better. And I got it in the end: "Say for us, friend, at Sparta, we now layed in earth received your orders. We obeyed." It was rather pleasing with that, because, notoriously, the Spartans were the people least given to talk in Classical Greece. They didn't care for the fancy, flowery phrase. They were blunt and short and, in fact, we have the modern word "laconic" from Sparta, because an alternate name for the city was Laconia. So I've been having an awful lot of fun doing things like that which are totally irrelevant to earning money; they give you a delightful warm glow inside.

THRUST: I see here that you've done at least one translation. Did you do that out of a desire to see some European SF translated decently?

BRUNNER: Yes. My motive was compounded in equal parts from a wish to add another string to my bow - to broaden one's talent is imperative to a writer; one dare not stand still - and because I think that there are an awful lot of false standards of comparison even within such a relatively small field as science fiction. It came as a tremendous shock to a great many of people when the movie Solaris was released. It may have come as an even greater shock to many people when they discovered how plodding the English version of the novel is. I say the English version because I understand that it was translated from a German translation and not directly from the Russian; that would probably account for a good many of its faults. Nonetheless, if one is ever to be able to keep up with what is going on in foreign science fiction, there must be an adequate and competent standard of translation. So when Gerard Klein agreed to translate Stand On Zanzibar - this feature could hardly have been a tougher novel to translate into French or any other language - I thought that perhaps I could do a little in the opposite direction. He happened to have given me one of his own books, which I read and thought I could translate. It's called The Overlords of War. It's apparently not Gerard Klein's best book, unfortunately, was translated by a very poor translator. I'd better not say what it is, to avoid libel suits; nonetheless, I've been told by many of my French speaking friends that they regard another of his novels as far and away the best he's ever done. But it offered some very interesting new problems. The whole French approach to science fiction is astonishingly different from the English or the American; it leans much more heavily on the Latin tradition, a sort of juxtaposition of extraordi-



THE MOST DANGEROUS MAN IN THE WORLD

by

CHRIS LAMPTON & DAVID BISCHOFF

Joey Rico, the tiny hoodlum from the Bronx, was smiling. In fact he was positively beaming, with a glow a good deal brighter than the naked 50-watt bulb that illuminated his small, dingy hotel room. As he dressed in front of the mirror he sang lightly to himself:

"Lenny Barrow, Lenny Barrow,
Shoulda walked the straight and narrow."

With a practiced flip he tied the knot in his black tie and shrugged his shoulders into a grey, three button suit. His mouth was grinning convulsively, his thin lips pulled back to reveal a row of yellow, horselike teeth. Those who knew Joey - at least those who knew him professionally - would probably not have recognized him. Joey himself could not remember the last time that he had smiled like this.

"You and me, babe," he said, jabbing playfully at his reflection. "You and me are gonna take care of business tonight." His ferret-like eyes gleamed in anticipation.

The little man ran a comb through his slick, black hair. He walked to the bed with a cocky strut and picked up a large, green briefcase. It was a case that had seen better days: its leatherette covering was peeling off in long, yellowing strips. But Joey handled it lovingly, like a mother caressing her newborn child.

"Lenny Barrow," he said, mouthing the name with obvious distaste. "Tonight you're gonna get yours, Lenny. This time you've gone and pushed me too far." His smile went lopsided, turning into a sneer. He sat down lightly on the edge of the bed and opened the briefcase snaps with his thumbs.

Inside, snuggled into the red satin interior, were what looked like three pieces of pipe, two of metal and one of wood. They seemed innocent enough, to the untrained eye, but appearances deceived. Assembled they were the pieces of a high powered sniper's rifle, the weapon of a professional assassin. Joey Rico, if nothing else, was a professional.

Joey examined the pieces one at a time, handling them with a white handkerchief to avoid leaving fingerprints. Satisfied, he tamped them back into the satin padding and thumbed the snaps closed. He replaced the handkerchief in his coat pocket.

He put the case aside and stretched out on the bed, propping his freshly polished shoes on the end of the bed frame. He had plenty of time. He was dressed to go; the only thing to do now was wait. It's about time, thought Joey. It's about time I did this. He produced a battered pack of Pall Malls from his shirt pocket and began smoking absentmindedly. Contentment settled over him like a cloud.

There was a knock on the door.

Joey dropped the cigarette in a flurry of bright orange ashes. The cops! he thought. Sheezus Christ! How did they know I was here? He was up almost instantly, poised on the edge of the bed, weighing his chances of escape. Slowly, cautiously, he picked up the green briefcase. Don't panic, he told himself. Maybe it's just some dope who's got the wrong room.

The knock came again. Stubborn bastard, thought Joey. With measured steps he began tip-toeing toward the window. If he could only make it to the fire escape in time...

But if it were the cops they'd have the fire escape guarded. And if it weren't the cops...well, why worry?

The knock came again.

"Whaddaya want?" growled Joey. It would be better in any case if he didn't act too suspiciously.

A voice from the hallway replied, "I'd like to talk with you for a moment, Mr. Rico." It was a man's voice, deep and cultured.

Goddamn it, thought Joey. Whoever it is knows my name. It must be the cops. Or - he shuddered - one of Lenny Barrow's boys.

"Get lost," he yelled. "I ain't talkin' to nobody now. Go bother somebody else." He carefully edged the bed away from the wall and wedged the briefcase behind the headboard.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Rico." The voice was coming from behind him now. "But it's quite important that I speak to you immediately."

Joey spun around with a snap. Seated across the room from him in an overstuffed armchair was a tall man in a light blue dinner jacket. He was about thirty-five years old, tanned to a burnished glow and grinning like the proverbial Cheshire cat. Joey's mouth fell open.

"Since you failed to open your door," the tall man said, "I took the liberty of admitting myself. I hope I haven't startled you."

"Who...who the hell are you?" stuttered Joey. "How'd you get in here? I got the door locked with a bolt."

"Gaining entrance to your room was a simple matter, Mr. Rico. I doubt that you would understand the mechanics of what I did, but in simple terms I removed myself to another continuum where the walls of your room do not exist."

"What're you talkin' about? You sayin' you can walk through walls?"

"Not exactly. I can, in a sense, circumvent them, by placing my own corporeal existence on another plane of reality."

"Hey! Try talkin' English! You a cop?"

"You mean an officer of the law? Certainly not!"

"Then get the hell out of here. I'm a citizen. I got certain rights to privacy."

"I'm sorry, Mr. Rico, but I can't leave until I've discussed an important matter with you."

Joey waved his hands in exasperation. The man had one hell of a lot of nerve, breaking into his room like this, uninvited. He can't be one of Barrow's men, thought Joey. He talks like a fag, for Chrissake! And if he's not a cop, what is he? Some kinda private detective?

"Look," he said. "I'm gonna give you five seconds to get outta here or I'm gonna do my

best to make you sorry you were ever born!"

"Please, Mr. Rico. I had hoped that you would conduct yourself in a more becoming manner. It seems almost unnecessary to point out that I am almost twice your weight and a good foot taller than you are. In any man to man combat situation I would almost certainly emerge victorious."

"Awright, so you're a big guy. I'll call the police, then."

"I doubt that you wish to see the police any more than I do. I imagine that they would be quite interested in the contents of that briefcase hidden behind your bed."

Joey started. "Hey listen! Don't get too nosy. I got friends...."

"All I'm asking is that you hear me out. I'd like to make you a - how shall I say? - a business proposition? I have come here, you might say, as a prospective client."

"Client? Whaddaya mean, 'client'? I ain't no lawyer."

"Of course not. But you do offer a service of sorts. And that service could be of great value to the people that I represent."

"I don't know what you're talkin' about."

"I think you do. Let's put our cards on the table, Mr. Rico. You are - how would you put it? - a hired gunman?"

"You can't pin anything on me!"

"I have no desire to. I wish only to engage your services. To put it bluntly, Mr. Rico, there is someone that we want you to..." He paused suddenly, as if he were unable to say the words; then, with visible concentration, closed his eyes and said, "...to kill!"

The room became suddenly quiet, almost tangibly so. Joey could feel the sweat break out on his body and fought the urge to take off his coat. Goddamn this guy, he thought. Somethin' about him gives me the creeps.

"Awright," Joey said, sitting on the edge of the bed. "Suppose you did hear somethin' about me doin' things like that - which you didn't, 'cause I don't - but if you did hear somethin' like that maybe you also heard somethin' else about me retirin' and goin' into another business."

"Going into another business?" The tall man leaned forward. "What are you doing here tonight, then? Were you planning on attending a business meeting?"

"Yeah. Somethin' like that. I'm, uh, going to meet, uh...with my business partners."

"Strop playing games, Mr. Rico. You're here to meet with Lenny Barrow, a big time gangster who has been blackmailing you for the last three years. Barrow is going to be at a theater this evening, where you plan to wait for him with your rifle. Then you're going to fly to Rio de Janiero to begin your so-called retirement...."

Joey flushed. "I told you to get out of here...."

"Calm down. Your personal vendettas are not my concern. As I said, I merely wish to engage your services."

"Why should I want to work for you?"

"We're willing to pay you handsomely."

"How much?"

"I believe your normal fee is ten thousand dollars...."

"Uh uh, buddy. You pay big or you don't pay at all."

"Name your fee, then."

"One million dollars, cash!"

"All right. I think that can be arranged."

For the second time Joey's mouth dropped open. One million dollars in cash! This guy is out of his tree! For Chrissake, maybe I should have asked for more!

"Wait a minute," he said. "I want that in advance! And I want all expenses paid."

"There will be no expenses, Mr. Rico. We will supply your transportation and ammunition." He gestured toward the bed. "I believe you already have the necessary weapon."

Joey glanced automatically toward the hidden gun. "I ain't said I'm gonna do it yet." The vision of a one followed by six zeroes flashed through his mind. "You...you better tell me who you are first, and what...it is you, uh, want me to do."

"Certainly." The tall man stretched out leisurely in the armchair. "I represent an organization of politicians who control the Amalgamated States of Earth at a point approximately one thousand years in your future."

Joey sat up straight. "Awright! Now who's playin' games? You either put your cards on the table or I ain't bettin'. Don't give me no phony stories like that."

"I assure you, Mr. Rico, that everything I tell you is the truth. I am quite incapable of lying."

"That's a lot of bull! There ain't nobody can't lie and you know it."

The tall man made an expansive gesture with his hands. "You live in very primitive times, Mr. Rico. People lie, cheat, kill...and all for petty reasons or no reasons at all. I can understand your cynicism. But in my time these primitive instincts no longer exist. They have been bred out of the human race by centuries of eugenic control. Not only are we incapable of lying, but we are incapable of any form of physical violence. When I indicated earlier that I would be your superior in a contest of physical strength it was merely a bluff. I am stronger than you, yes, but I could no more engage in such a contest than I could fly out this window. I am incapable of inflicting harm on another human being."

Holy Jesus! thought Joey. This guy's really whacked out! "C'mon," he said. "You expect me to believe this crap about you comin' from - what did you say? - a thousand years in the future? You ain't givin' me much credit for brains, are you?"

"But it's true. Time travel is quite a common thing in the 30th century."

"Oh, yeah?" Joey smiled cunningly. "So how come you don't come visitin' more often? How come I ain't never seen no time travellers before?"

"Oh, I'm sure that you have. Many times. But there are very strict rules concerning the use of time travel devices. A time traveller may reveal his identity only in times of strictest emergency. There are too many temporal paradoxes that might result."

Oh boy, thought Joey. This guy's a basket case. But I better play along with him and see what he wants. "Listen, he said. "If, uh, you can only tell people who you are in an emergency, why are you tellin' me? You in some kind of trouble?"

"Not exactly. But the situation is an emergency of sorts. As I said before, the people that I represent urgently require your services."

"Yeah. You said you want me to kill somebody. So when you gonna tell me who?"

"Momentarily, Mr. Rico. It's quite a long story, actually. As I said before, I represent a political organization - I believe its nature would be most closely analogous to one of your present day political parties. For some time now our party, if I may employ that term, has controlled world politics - by popular mandate, of course. During the last decade, however, a new faction has arisen - an organization of political dissidents - and has been slowly gaining power. As public opinion has shifted more and more in favor of this new party, our hold on world government has weakened.

"I can't tell you how important it is that our party remain in power. Our most cherished dreams of world reform have yet to reach fruition. If we are to achieve our long sought goals we must prevent our opponents from gaining power in the next election."

"I get it," said Joey, a sinister gleam in his eye. "You want me to bump off the opposition for you, right?"

"Nothing so barbaric. Assassination as a

means of political expediency is a thing of the past, in my era at least. In this case we have devised a method that is infinitely more subtle - and humane." The tall man stood and began pacing the floor.

"Political analysis, in my time, has become an exact science, quite unlike the crude guesswork that passes for political theory in yours. Our political analysts have made a thorough study of this shift in public opinion and have have to some very interesting conclusions.

"First of all," - he spun around to face Joey - "they traced the roots of the shift back hundreds of years. They found its origins in a number of events occurring in the latter half of the twentieth century. "Your century," he added.

"They also determined that with a little judicious tampering it would be possible to reverse the tide of events. In fact the elimination of a single individual at all that would be necessary to sufficiently alter history. If this individual should cease to exist, our opponents would never rise to power and our party would remain the uncontested leader in world affairs."

"And you can't kill this guy yourselves 'cause you ain't got the, uh, primitive instincts for it, right?"

"Succinctly put. And that, as you would have it, is where you fit in."

"You want me to kill this guy?"

"Please. The expression is distasteful. I prefer the euphemism 'to eliminate.' He will be at a certain place at a certain time - it was simple enough for us to determine where and when. I'll take you there and you'll...do what is necessary, then I'll return you to your room. Have I left anything unclear?"

"Well, yeah. I mean there's somethin' I don't get."

"And that is...?"

"This bit about one guy changin' your election and all. I mean, how can one guy today make a difference in somethin' that ain't gonna happen for a thousand years? He must be somebody pretty important - like some kinda politician or somethin'"

"Not at all. He's actually quite unimportant - but tiny flames can start great fires, Mr. Rico. Over the course of centuries an effect can be magnified out of all proportion to its cause. An insignificant action today - the lighting of a cigarette, for instance - may result in the deposing of a world leader five hundred years from now."

"That don't make no sense. How could lightin' a cigarette do that?"

"Well...suppose you stopped someone on the street and asked him for a match. Because you stopped him he might miss his bus. Because he missed his bus he might be late for an appointment and because he's late for an appointment he might lose his job. After he loses his job many things could happen - or fail to happen. I believe you have a saying that begins, 'For the want of a nail...'"

"What's a nail got to do with it?" Joey frowned. "Alright, I think I get what you're talkin' about. Now listen, suppose I say I'll, uh...eliminate this guy for you - what are the details? I got plans, you knew."

The tall man smiled. "Your plans won't interfere. We'll want to get underway immediately. Our rendezvous is to take place approximately...," he pulled a watch-like device from his coat pocket, "one hour from now."

"A half hour! Are you outta your mind. I gotta, uh, be at the theater in," he glanced at his watch, "forty minutes."

"No problem at all. You'll be able to keep your appointment with Mr. Barrow and perform our mission as well."

"How? I can't be in two places at the same time."

"You most certainly can." The tall man leaned forward. "If I recall correctly, I am, at this very moment, in India, discussing religion with a Hindu priest."

"Huh?"

"When one possesses the ability to travel in time, simultaniety takes on a new meaning. One can exist in hundreds, even thousands of places at precisely the same instant."

"You mean I can bump off your guy and Lenny Barrow at the same time?" Joey's eyes sparked with interest.

"Of course you can. I'll take you forward twenty minutes into the future where you will accomplish your task. Then you'll be returned to the exact moment of your departure, where you may do as you wish."

Two places at the same time, thought Joey. Holy Jesus, what more could I want? If I could be in two places at the same time I could establish the perfect alibi, commit the perfect crime....

"I must ask for your decision, Mr. Rico."

"Huh?" Joey snapped back to awareness. "Oh, yeah. Yeah. I'll do your job for you." His eyes narrowed. "Just show me the million bucks first."

"Certainly. I'll have it for you right away." The tall man stood and pulled back the sleeve of his jacket, revealing what appeared to be a large plastic toy watch. It was a tight band of some shiny blue material, snugly circling his wrist. It actually had a watch face on it: three of them, in fact, overlapping one another in concentric circles.

"This is my time travel device," he said. "We call it a temporizer. Its appearance is not terribly impressive, I'm afraid."

He touched a tiny lever to the side of the watch face. "I'll return in a moment," he said. He vanished silently into the air.

"Jesus Christ!" Joey exclaimed, staring blankly at the spot where the tall man had stood. Instinctively he waved his arm in the air to see if anything remained.

He wasn't kidding, he thought. He really is a time traveller! Joey fell back on the bed, his head spinning with more thoughts than it was meant to contain.

And if he really can travel in time, thought Joey, then what he said about being in two places at the same time must be true, too... He stood up and began pacing excitedly about the room.

Two places at the same time....

If I could be in two places at the same time...

...I could commit the perfect crime.

He leaned against the window sill and stared out at the late evening sun hanging in the sky just above a large building across the street.

If I could be in two places at the same time, he thought, I could rob a bank - or commit a murder - and then make myself an alibi so airtight that the cops could never break it. I could - his heart beat faster - be the most dangerous man in the world! The cops could never touch me!

If I only had that gadget he's got on his wrist....

Once Joey had conceived the idea he couldn't shake it off. If he could have that gadget - the temporizer - he would have power like no criminal had ever dreamed of.

There was a predatory gleam in his eye. His breathing came more quickly; he hunched forward against the window like some hungry jungle beast preparing to spring on an unwary victim. A voice inside his head repeated over and over: the most dangerous man in the world...the most dangerous man in the world....

There was the sound of a footstep behind him.

He turned and saw the time traveller, standing again in the center of the room. He had changed clothing - now he wore a tight fitting blue body tight, with a short cape-like attachment around the neck. In one hand he held a black suitcase and in the other a small brown bag.

19

"Where'd you get the long underwear?" Joey asked. "You look like Superman or somethin'."

"Superman? Isn't that the creation of one of your twentieth century philosophers? This 'long underwear' as you call it, is the standard clothing of my time. I hope it doesn't offend you, but it does afford me a great deal of comfort."

"S'okay with me. How'd you get changed so fast?"

"I beg your pardon? Oh, I see. It would seem to you that I have been gone for but a few moments. Actually, I was gone for several days. Believe me, it's no easy task to acquire a million dollars in twentieth century bills." He tossed Joey the suitcase.

"This is the money?" Joey asked. The time traveller nodded. Joey snapped open the suitcase and began greedily counting the bills inside.

"I assure you, Mr. Rico, that it contains the agreed upon amount. I'm afraid, though, that we have no more time to waste. We must hurry." He handed Joey the small, brown bag.

Joey dumped its contents onto the bed. It contained three long, thin bullets. Joey turned them over carefully in his fingers.

"We hope," the time traveller said, "that you'll require no more than one. However, we must be prepared for emergencies."

A sudden thrill ran up Joey's back. He's playin' right into my hands, he thought. He dropped the bullets into his pockets. Pulling the bed away from the wall he removed the green briefcase from its hiding place.

"Come on now," the tall man beckoned. "We have only ten minutes before the rendezvous." He extended his arm. "Take my hand."

"Your...hand?" Joey stared dubiously.

"Of course. We must be in contact to bring you within the temporizer field." Joey came forward cautiously. The tall man took him by the elbow, then rolled back his sleeve to reveal the blue, watch-like temporizer.

"Look," Joey said, "I'm a little nervous about this time travel bit. Could you, uh, show me how that gadget works before we go anyplace? It'd make me feel a little more comfortable."

"Certainly. But we must hurry. There are only a few moments left."

He held out his wrist to give Joey a better view of the device. At close range he could plainly see the three concentric dials on the temporizer face: dials marked with what appeared to be numerical calibrations, though the numerals were subtly different from those with which Joey was familiar.

The tall man explained: "Before one disembarks on a temporal journey, he must set these dials for the desired date. You might call the inner dial the 'fine tuning.' It is used for small, delicate movements in time. The outer dials, of course, are for greater movements - months, years, even centuries.

"Since we are moving only a short distance into the future we need only concern ourselves with the center dial. It is controlled by the use of this lever." He indicated three small, green-tipped levers on the side of the device. He pressed the one closest to his wrist and a tiny red indicator moved forward on the inner dial.

"That should take us approximately fifteen minutes into the future. Now to begin the actual temporal movement, you need only apply a slight pressure here...." He indicated a red tipped lever next to the three green ones. "The greater the pressure the faster the movement in time." He pushed it slightly. "We are now moving at a rate of approximately five to one. Five minutes of real time for every one minute of subjective time."

"I don't feel anything different," said Joey. "You sure that gadget's workin'?"

"Of course. There is no real sensation involved in time travel. But here...." He indicated the bed post. "If you require some proof of our temporal motion, try touching that."

Joey hesitated. "What's gonna happen?" he asked, dubiously. "Will I get a shock or somethin'?"

"Not exactly. In fact I doubt that you'll feel a thing."

"Okay. But I'm warnin' you...." He extended his hand and touched the bed post as carefully as if it had been made of tissue. His hand passed through it like a cloud. He emitted a small gasp.

The tall man gasped. "I hope you find that demonstration convincing enough. We are in an entirely different continuum now, one in which we can have no contact with the world we see around us. Only light particles, by some freak of nature, can pass through the barrier - allowing us to see back into the continuum from which we came. But even that is a one way flow. We are invisible to anyone in that other world."

"But...but it we can't touch nothin', how come we don't fall through the floor?"

"We are held in place by the temporizer field. It generates a powerful electromagnetic current, which locks us as firmly into this segment of space as electrons are locked into their orbits. This, however," he flipped open the temporizer face to reveal a small red knob inside, "is called a locator. It allows me to shift the position of the temporizer field and ourselves with it. With its help we can move through space as well as time. Simply push the knob in the desired direction of travel...."

He gave it a slight nudge. The two men slid lightly across the floor. As they approached the outer wall, Joey automatically threw up his arms for protection.

"That's hardly necessary," said the tall man as they passed wraithlike through the brick. Suddenly they were suspended high above the city, skyscrapers rearing around them like upraised fists. The early morning sun was reflected like tiny bonfires in thousands of office windows. Far away Joey caught the glimmer of the river between two buildings. His stomach forced its way into his throat.

"There is much grandeur," the tall man said, "in these primitive stone and glass buildings. That one there," he indicated the Empire State Building, "still stands in my time, though it had to be partially rebuilt, I'm told, after the Eighth World War. It's become quite a tourist attraction - one of the Fifteen Wonders of the World."

Joey made a gurgling sound.

"I hope you're not prone to motion sickness, Mr. Rico. These aerial excursions are a bit rough on the novice...."

Joey gasped and, with almost explosive force, emptied the contents of his stomach in the direction of a nearby seagull. The half digested food particles formed into tiny balls of brown liquid and hung suspended in the temporizer field just below Joey's feet.

"My apologies, Mr. Rico. I had no idea you suffered from such a weak stomach."

"S'allright," gasped Joey, his face white.

"Fortunately, we have almost reached our destination."

They hovered over the roof of a large apartment building. The tall man lowered them gently to the sun deck and, with a slight pressure on the red lever, brought them back into the normal continuum.

Joey sat limply on the gravel, breathing in short, ragged breaths. The tall man said, "I'm afraid you have only a few moments to prepare yourself, Mr. Rico. Your, ah, victim will be making his appearance in about five minutes. He'll be over here, I believe."

The tall man led Joey to the edge of the roof, where he could see, far below, the intersection of two large streets. Traffic was light now, in the early evening hours. A few yellow taxis darted madly from lane to lane, fighting their way through crowds of oblivious pedestrians.

The view caused another twinge in Joey's stomach, but he steadied himself and peered over.

"He will be appearing there...." The tall man indicated the street corner directly beneath them. "He will wait briefly for that light, then cross the street diagonally toward the far corner. You will have approximately thirty seconds to accomplish your task - time enough to discharge all three rounds if necessary. If you miss with the first shot, don't worry. He probably won't be able to hear you over the noise of the traffic."

Joey nodded. He opened the briefcase and began assembling the pieces of the rifle, fastening them together with professional care. When it was assembled he made a few slight adjustments in the telescopic sight, using the tiny jewelers instruments he kept in his coat pocket. Then he lay the rifle against the low retaining wall at the edge of the roof and waited for a signal.

The tall man was carefully studying the temporizer dial. "Are you ready?" he asked. Joey nodded assent. "Very good. He should be appearing...now!

A man appeared below and - as predicted - paused briefly for the street light. He was wearing a suit - probably a businessman. Joey could tell nothing more about him. He found the man easily in the sight of his rifle.

The light changed and the man began walking toward the opposite corner. Joey tracked him in the gun sight, carefully following the rhythm of his walk. Slowly, easily, he began to squeeze the trigger.

Then, suddenly, the man dropped out of the sight. Joey caught his breath. Looking away from the gun sight he could see the man standing frozen in the middle of the intersection, staring upward.

What's the matter with this guy? thought Joey. What's he doin' standin' there in the middle of the street? Joey automatically followed the direction of the man's gaze, up to the top of a nearby building. The man was staring at a bright red billboard with a picture of a pack of cigarettes on it.

Now what the hell's he doin' that for? Joey thought. What's so fascinatin' about a billboard? He wanna hold up traffic or somethin'? Joey quickly lifted the gun back into place. Well, he told himself, if he wants to hold still while I shoot him, that's his business.

But the man didn't hold still. Even as Joey brought him back into the gun sight he broke out running, heading wildly for the curb.

"Damn it!" Joey muttered. "I wish this bastard would make up his mind." Remaining calm, Joey squeezed the trigger. Even before the man fell to the ground Joey's well trained instincts told him he had hit his mark.

"Did you strike your target?" the tall man asked, from behind him. Joey turned and realized that the time traveller had not been watching. Rather, he was facing the opposite side of the building. Must be too squeamish to watch, thought Joey.

"No. I missed," he lied. "Must be a stiff wind down there. I'll try again." Joey quietly turned and leaned against the retaining wall. He propped the gun on his knees and aimed it at the tall man's head. Slowly, carefully, he pulled the trigger.

Even before the echoes had died away, Joey could hear sirens in the distance.

It doesn't matter, he thought. I've got the temporizer now and nobody can touch me.

He removed the device from the tall man's wrist. It was held by a sort of velcro binding that gave way easily when pressure was applied.

The most dangerous man in the world! he thought. Let's see. He said it worked like this....

He moved the green lever gently, until the inner dial was back approximately where it had been set before they left the apartment.

Okay, he thought, now I pull this lever here....

RIVERSIDE QUARTERLY

The critical magazine for science-fiction and fantasy

Past and future articles:

Lloyd Eagle, "S-F Goes to College: Crowes and Nightmare of Academe,"

Robert Lowndes, "A Eulogy for the Dying S-F Magazines,"

Ursula Le Guin, "The Crab Nebula, the Parasaccum, and Tolstoy,"

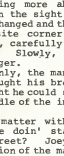
Richard Dale Mullen, "The Prudish Prurience of H. Rider Haggard and Edgar Rice Burroughs,"

Fritz Leiber, "Utopia for Poets and Witches,"

Alexei Panshin, "Heinlein in Dimension,"

Stephen Goble, "Mythology in Samuel Delany's The Einstein Intersection,"

Roger Zelazny, "Cordwainer Smith"



plus columns by Bill Blackbeard, Jim Harmon, Harry Warner

plus letters, poetry, reviews, etc. by Poul Anderson, Ray Bradbury, Sam Delany, Steven Fisher, Tom Disch, Philip Jose Farmer, Neil Gaiman, Joanna Russ, Carol Oates, Bob Silverberg,Mary Weinkauf, Jack Williamson...

plus art by ATOM, Cy Chauvin, REA, Vincent di Fate, Charles Schneemen, Adrienne Fein, Jan Jonsson, Barry Kabbilitz, ESG...

Subscriptions $2 (four issues) from:

RIVERSIDE QUARTERLY
Box 16451 University Station
Gainesville, FL 32604

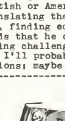
Note: All 20 back issues are either currently available at 50¢ each or--in the case of numbers 10 through 12--scheduled for reprinting (at same price) early in '74.

Special Offer: A $6 (or larger) order brings you a free copy of The Cornucopia: A Symposium, with Robert Bloch, Arthur Cox, Fritz Leiber, and Ben Stasheff.

Interview with John Brunner(cont. p.15)

nary events. It tends to rely more on coming to terms with marvels than British or American sf seems to. So, translating that book and, in particular, finding quivilents for the French words that he coined was a very interesting challenge and I'm glad I took it on. I'll probably do a few more translations; maybe one or two a year.

----------The End----------



SPECIAL OFFER
Advertiser's
"BOOK OF SKULLS"
Publisher's hrdc. -
Regularly $6.95

NOW $1.79!

Here's a Long-Life Binding at paperback price! (Save 71%!)

TRY OUR SERVICES!

ORDER BY MAIL Fast dependable service. Deduct 10% on all orders over $12.00 Price of books include 25¢ postage. Foreign customers should remit by International Postal Money Order.

Author	Title	Price
Aldiss, Brian -	THE EIGHTY MINUTE HOUR	$6.20
Bradner, Raphael (ed.) -	Science Fiction Today and Tomorrow	6.20
Dann, Jack (ed.) -	WANDERING STARS (Jewish SF Fantasy)	7.20
Dickson, Gordon -	THE STAR ROAD	6.20
Elwood, Roger (ed.) -	TOMORROW'S ALTERNATIVES	6.20
Farmer, Philip J. -	Doc Savage: His Apocalyptic Life	7.20
Harrison, Harry -	Stainless Steel Rat Saves the World	6.20
Harrison, Harry -	STAR SMASHERS & GALAXY RANGERS	6.20
Hawkian, Robert -	TIME ENOUGH FOR LOVE	8.20
Jones, D.F. -	THE FALL OF COLOSSUS	6.20
Knight, Damon (ed.) -	ORBIT 13	6.20
Pangborn, Edgar -	Good Neighbors and Other Strangers	6.20
Wallace, Ian -	FAN SAGITTARIUS	6.20
Zelazny, Roger -	THE GUNS OF AVALON	6.20

SEND FOR S F CATALOG
Illustrated and listing over 1500 SF, Fantasy books (hardcover, paperback), magazines — non-fiction and fiction). Rates 25¢ for postage.

PURPLE UNICORN BOOKS
4 532-84 London Rd., Duluth, MN 55804

THE ALIEN CRITIC

☐ AN INFORMAL SCIENCE FICTION ☐ FANTASY JOURNAL

A Fascinating Look At Science Fiction From The Inside by:

☐ JAMES BLISH
☐ FRITZ LEIBER
☐ JOHN BRUNNER
☐ FREDERIK POHL
☐ HARLAN ELLISON
☐ POUL ANDERSON
☐ PHILIP K. DICK
☐ TED WHITE
☐ ALEXEI & CORY PANSHIN
☐ and many others

ARTICLES - INTERVIEWS
COLUMNS - COMMENTARY
REVIEWS - LETTERS-NEWS
NEW BOOK & STORY LISTS

QUARTERLY
$4. One Year
$7. Two Years
$1. Sample

P. O. Box 11408
Portland, OR
97211

He felt nothing, but a bird flew by the building, moving backwards. Far below him, the cars had all gone into reverse.

"I guess it's workin'," he said, speaking out loud. "Now, how do I get outta here?"

He found a catch on the side of the temporizer and opened up the face. He pushed the red locator knob forward.

With a quick jerk he sailed out over the city, dangling like a puppet on magnetic strings. His stomach bobbed like a demented yoyo, forcing his adam's apple practically into his mouth. "Hey!" he yelled. "How do you stop this damn thing?" He wrenched the knob in the opposite direction, sending him just as rapidly back the way he had come. Finally he brought himself to a tentative midair halt. He retched emptily at the buildings below.

Slowly, through careful trial and error, he worked his way back to the hotel room.

He returned to a few moments after the initial disembarkation. Joey was grateful for this. It would be rather embarassing to encounter his earlier self and the time traveller - how could he explain the fact that he was returning alone, with the temporizer, yet? Of course, he could not have encountered them - he would have remembered it from before, right?

He lay on the bed in a state of nervous exhaustion. His head was spinning, his stomach boiling. He briefly considered using the temporizer to keep his appointment with Lenny Barrow. But no - it would be some time before he was ready for another trip like that.

Okay, he thought. I gotta get a hold of myself. Accordin' to this gadget I got about a half hour before Lenny Barrow gets to the theater. I can walk there in twenty minutes, so I'd better get goin' now.

He stood on uncertain feet and stumbled toward the door, almost forgetting to take the briefcase with the million dollars. He practically crawled to the elevator, which took him down to the lobby, where he checked the money in the hotel safe.

Once outside on the street he felt better. The waning sunlight restored his flagging spirits. His walk became brisker, more confident. He briefly considered taking a subway, but realized that walking would be just as fast.

He thought about the device on his wrist. I won't even have to hide when I shoot him, he thought. Witnesses won't matter if I can prove I was some place else when it happened.

He smiled. It gave him a feeling of power to know he had the temporizer - the very feeling he had been looking for when he chose murder as his profession. He had never found it until now.

He cut down a side street, a short cut on his way to the theater. In the shadow of the surrounding buildings his thoughts went back to the time traveller - when they had talked together in his room.

It's funny, he thought, what that guy said about the future. About one man changin' it and all. I wonder who that guy was, that I killed? What was he gonna do that they had to stop him like that?

Suppose that guy was Lenny Barrow. Suppose Lenny was gonna do somethin' they didn't want him to do. Then he'd have to be knocked off. But that's stupid. I'm gonna knock Lenny off anyway. So they wouldn't have to go to all that trouble.

But suppose it was somethin' that Lenny was gonna do if I didn't knock him off? Suppose it was somethin' that they wanted him to do?

Joey came out of the alley and turned on to a major thouroughfare, absorbed in thought.

Then they'd have to get rid of the guy that was gonna kill him, he thought. Then I'd be the one that would have to be....

Joey stopped, standing in the middle of a large intersection. It wasn't the thought that made him stop, but something that he saw. High above the street there was a large red billboard with a picture of a pack of cigarettes on it.

SECOND STORY BOOKS

5016 Connecticut Ave. N.W.
Washington D.C. 20008

244-5550

Noon-8 p.m., 6 days
Closed Monday
Well stocked in used hardbacks
and paperbacks.
Paperbacks 1/2 cover price; including
300+ science fiction

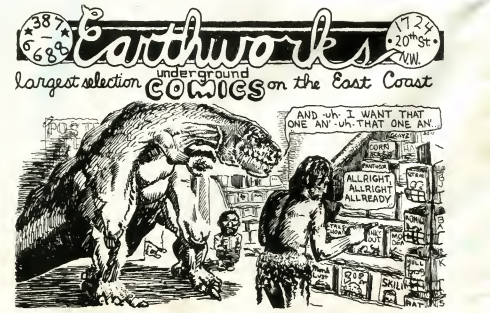
IMAGINATION GALLERIES

946 Sligo Avenue
Silver Spring, Md. 20910

SCIENCE FICTION COMICS
PAPERBACKS POSTERS
COLLECTANEA COLLECTIBLES
ADDENDA COLLIGENDA

Open Daily 11:30 - 7:00 PM
Fridays till Midnight

(301) 585-7373 and 585-2100


Earthworks
underground
largest selection COMICS on the East Coast
AND uh I WANT THAT ONE AN' uh THAT ONE AN'
ALLRIGHT ALLRIGHT ALLREADY
SKULL

let's eat at
Hungry Herman
College Park & 20th & M Street NW